



Travertine Tidbits

Notes from Chickasaw National Recreation Area

Park Issues Addressed

This issue of **Travertine Tidbits** addresses some of the questions and comments made at the August 23rd open meeting at the Murray County Expo. Future editions will explore more complex issues and future public forums will continue the dialog about park policy and operations. Sometime this fall, a formal **public comment period** will open as part of the new **General Management Plan** for Chickasaw National Recreation Area.

Elected officials spoke briefly. U.S. Congressman Tom Cole pledged his commitment to listening and improving relationships. Oklahoma Senator Johnnie Crutchfield encouraged the community to work through conflicts and not lose sight of the larger purpose. Oklahoma State Representative Wes Hilliard said his attendance at a Gateway Community Workshop helped him learn how important it is for all to work together to enhance each other and build relationships. Murray County Commissioner Billy Frank Lance assured everyone he had spoken at length with park officials regarding constituent concerns and will continue to work to find solutions. Recreation and tourism generate about 40% of the county's sale tax revenue. Murray County Commissioners Jim Britt and Jimmie Primrose acknowledged the importance of tourism and the park and pledged their support.

General Comments and Questions:

Concern: The (new) exhibits at Travertine Nature Center are static and not interesting to children

Response: The new exhibits are being temporarily displayed at the Travertine Nature Center. They were designed and built for the new Visitor Center which still lacks funding. Congressman Cole continues to seek funding for the new Visitor Center

Concern: Visitation is declining in the park this year

Response: Visitation was up 10% over last year at the end of the second quarter.

Concern: Aggressive signage discourages visitors, as did the "barricade" on 12th Street.

Response: The Notice Signs regarding water quality at bathing beach/swimming holes along Travertine and Rock Creek in the park are required by federal law when levels of *e.coli* are exceeded. When bacteria levels drop, the Notice Sign is turned around and simply informs visitors the beaches are monitored. The barricade referred to was a safety check point set up the City of Sulphur Police Department. Park Rangers assisted, but did not initiate the check point.

Concern: The Historic 1906 Candlelight Tour has been eliminated.

Response: The program, as it was, exceeded the ability of staff time and money to continue. A special event based on community history is a possibility in the future. Assistance from interested community groups is welcome to develop a future program. The special events which replaced the tour for 2005 and 2006 included the Songwriter's Contest and the 100th Birthday Celebration. The two

events hosted 1,200 people.

Concern: The pavilion at the dam at the Lake of the Arbuckles is closed and there is a rumor the Chickasaw Nation is putting a marina on the lake.

Response: The dam at the Lake of the Arbuckles and the pavilion are owned and administered by the Arbuckle Master Conservancy and Bureau of Reclamation, not the park. The dam and pavilion structure near the dam were closed to public use since September 11, 2001 as a matter of national security. The Chickasaw Nation has **not** proposed a marina operation.

Concern: Thugs in the park scare young children and concern was expressed about "undesirable" park users.

Response: Ranger ranks have been thin this summer - many personnel have been out fighting fires in the local area. Rangers do need to put their feet on the ground more often in campgrounds and around the lake. A ranger bicycle patrol was initiated this summer with very positive comments from visitors.

Praise: The park service was praised for continued and aggressive removal of eastern red cedar. The park experience is one of fun and education and everyone in the community should support it so the community will not lose the park. Park Rangers responded immediately to a request to reduce speeding incidents on the Goddard Youth Camp Road to make it safe for the children. The camp and the park have a good working relationship. Safety would be improved, said one neighbor, if high-powered rifles are prohibited during hunting season - please consider shotgun or archery seasons only.

Major Issue: Many comments were expressed about the special use permit requirements, commercial filming permits, and commercial use authorizations.

Response: Park officials will continue to work with Congressman Cole's office to review the legal requirements and determine what can be done to "soften" some of the impact of this new law. Permits have been required of certain activities for several years. However, in May of 2006 cost recovery fees were mandated. Go to the park website for details on the current requirements of **Special Use Permits:** www.nps.gov/chic. **Commercial Filming Permits** go to www.nps.gov on the left side, click on "News", then click on "Permits". **Commercial Use Authorizations** (permits to conduct business in the park) require the business owner to carry liability insurance. Senator Crutchfield will look into state assistance with liability insurance needs of the trail ride operation. If you are considering starting an activity or service that occurs in the park, please call us for assistance with the permit. 580-622-3161.

Comments and questions can be directed to Superintendent Connie Rudd at chic_superintendent@nps.gov or call 580/622-3161. If you would like to receive electronically, please send email to above address.